ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

Volume Two

THE GNOSTIC SCHOOLS

DIMENSIONAL ARTS

DIMENSIONS, founded in 1953, is non-sectarian and non-political, and is produced by an unsalaried staff on a non-profit basis.

Its purpose is to search out and share those fundamental principles underlying ancient and modern experience and thought which provide the basis for man's evolutionary progress—principles which can help him in a practical way fulfill his responsibilities to himself and his fellow men.

Editor: CLARENCE KLUG

Subscriptions, manuscripts and all correspondence should be sent to:
DIMENSIONAL ARTS, P.O. BOX 346, OJAI, CALIFORNIA

The title "Dimensions" is registered in the U.S. Patent Office.
Published at The Retreat, Ojai, California.

Dimensional Arts
P.O. Box 346
OJAI, CALIFORNIA

So understand the Light, He answered, and make friends with it.

HERMES THE THRICE-GREATEST.

Prelude

When Churches know Jesus-Christ
A symbol dual to be,
That everyone the snake must hoist
To reach his liberty,
The masses will begin to climb
From out the depths of hell;
For ignorance during all this time
Has kept them in its spell,
And they have worshipped only man
Instead of "THAT", which IS,
For Scripture's letter they did scan,
And not its synthesis.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Slowly, and consistently, archaeological evidence accumulates which proves beyond doubt that the ancient world was in possession of that great secret of spiritual truth which so completely satisfies the religious needs of humanity. A truth which confers life, light, and truth - - the truth which the world of today so urgently needs and of which it knows so little.

Though the world of today has its many secrets - and some not so secret - they are but breeders of death, sorrow, lust, disaster, avarice and selfishness. We can make no real progress while entangled in such deceits and ignorance of the Cosmic Laws.

The uncovering of those earlier truths permit us a means of directing our efforts toward a more abundant life, based upon knowledge of the ancient laws.

The following fragment, accredited to Hermes, and called the Asclepian Dialogue (which has not yet been completely translated into English), is of interest for its remarkable prophecy concerning the future of Egypt. The student who is searching for the deeper truths as so clearly revealed by ancient writing will be especially concerned by the words of Hermes.

"Are you ignorant, O Asclepius, that Egypt is the image of heaven, or, which is more true, a translation and descent of everything which is governed and exercised in heaven? And, if it may be said, our land is truly the temple of the whole world. Nevertheless, because it becomes wise men to foreknow all things, it is not lawful that you should be ignorant that the time will come when it may seem that the Egyptians have in vain, with a pious mind and sedulous religion, paid attention to divinity, and all their holy veneration shall become void and of no effect. For divinity shall return back to heaven. Egypt shall be forsaken, and the land which was the seat of divinity shall be destitute of religion, and deprived of the presence of the Gods. For when strangers shall possess and fill this region and land there shall not only be a neglect of religion, but (which is more miserable) there shall be laws enacted against religion, piety and divine worship; they shall be prohibited and punishments shall be inflicted on their votaries. Then this most holy land, the seat of places consecrated to divinity, and of temples, shall be full of sepulchres and dead bodies. O Egypt, Egypt, fables alone shall remain of thy religion, and these such as will be incredible to posterity and words alone shall be left engraved in stones, narrating thy pious deeds. The Scythian also, or Indian, or some other similar nation, shall inherit Egypt. For divinity shall return to heaven, all its inhabitants shall die, and thus Egypt, bereft both of God and man, shall be deserted. I call on thee, O most holy river, and predict to thee future events. Thou shalt burst forth with a torrent of blood, full even to thy banks, and thy divine waters shall not only be polluted with blood, but the land shall be inundated with it, and the number of the dead shall exceed that of the living. He, likewise, who survives, shall only, by his language, be known to be an Egyptian, but by his deeds he will appear to be a stranger. Why do you weep, O Asclepius? Egypt shall experience more ample and much worse evils than these, though she was once holy, and the greatest lover of the Gods on the earth, by the desert of her religion. And she who was alone the reductor of sanctity and the mistress of piety will be an example of the greatest cruelty. Then also, through the weariness of men, the world will not appear to be an admirable and adorable thing. This whole good,(a better than which, as an object of perception, there neither is, nor was, nor will be), will be in danger, and will be grievous to men. Hence this whole world will be despised, and will not be beloved, though it is the immutable work of God, a glorious fabric, a good compounded with multiform variety of images, a machine of the will of God, who, in his work, gave his suffrage without envy, that all things should

be one. It is also a multiform collected heap, capable of being venerated, praised and loved by those that behold it. For darkness shall be preferred to light, and death shall be judged to be more useful than life. No one shall look up to heaven. The religious man shall be accounted insane, the irreligious shall be thought wise, the furious brave, and the worst of men shall be considered a good man. For the soul, and all things about it, by which it is either naturally immortal, or conceives that it shall attain to immortality, conformably to what I have explained to you, shall not only be the subject of laughter, but shall be considered as vanity. Believe me, likewise, that a capital punishment shall be appointed for him who applies himself to the religion of intellect. New statutes and new laws shall be established, and nothing religious, or which is worthy of heaven or celestial concerns, shall be heard or believed by the mind. There will be a lamentable departure of the Gods from men; noxious angels will alone remain, who, being mingled with human nature, will violently impel the miserable men (of that time) to war, to rapine, to fraud, and to everything contrary to the nature of the soul. Then the earth shall be in a preternatural state; the sea shall not be sailed in, nor shall the heavens accord with the course of the stars nor the course of the stars continue in the heavens. Every divine voice shall be dumb by a necessary silence, the fruits of the earth shall be corrupted, nor shall the earth be prolific, and the air itself shall languish with a sorrowful torpor. These events and such old age of the world as this shall take place, such irreligion, inordination, and unreasonableness of all good. When all these things shall happen, O Asclepius, then that lord and father, the God who is first in power, and the one governor of the world, looking into the manners and voluntary deeds (of men), and by his will, which is the benignity of God, resisting vices, and recalling the error arising from the corruption of all things; washing away likewise all malignity by a deluge, or consuming it by fire, or bringing it to an end by disease and pestilence dispersed in different places, will recall the world to its ancient form, in order that the world itself may appear to be an adorable and admirable production, and God, the fabricator and restorer of so great a work, may be celebrated, by all that shall then exist, with frequent solemn praises and benedictions."

The many fragments and scrolls now being unearthed and deciphered all point to the immediate future as the time when the secret wisdom shall again be the dominating religious and philosophical urge of the world. Thus, these volumes dealing with the findings of the original Oxyrhyncus papyri will shed light on much that has hitherto been unknown.

DIMENSIONS

Clarence A. Klug

Editor

SOME ROUGH OUTLINES OF THE BACK-GROUND OF THE GNOSIS.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS.

The Greatest Story in the World.

THE familiar story of the origins of Christianity which we have all drunk in as it were with our mothers' milk, may be said to be almost a part of the consciousness of the Western world. It is interwoven with our earlist recollections; it has been stamped upon our infant consciousness with a solemnity which has repressed all questioning; it has become the "thing we have grown used to." It has upon its side that stupendous power of inertia, the force of custom, against which but few have the strength to struggle. But once let the ordinary man desire to know more about the greatest story in the world, as all its tellers assert, and he must begin the struggle. Previously he has been led to believe not only that the story is absolutely unique, but that it is entirely supernatural. In brief, if he analyses his own understanding of the story he finds it violently divorced from all historical environment, a thing of

itself, standing alone, in unnatural isolation. His picture has no background.

The Need of a Background.

Moreover he will find it very difficult to fill in that background, no matter how industriously he may labour. He may read many books on the "Life and Times of our Lord," only to find that for the most part the environment has been made to fit the story and its main features have been taken from it; in brief, he does not feel that he has been put in contact with the natural environment for which he is seeking.

There are of course a few works which are not of this nature, but the general reader seldom hears of them, for they are generally regarded as "dangerous" and "disturbing."

But even if we go deeper into the matter and make a special study of the history of the origins, with the largest of libraries at our disposal, we find that no writer has as yet given us a really sufficient sketch of the environment, and without this it is impossible to have a real comprehension of the nature of infant Christianity and the full scope of its illumination; without it we shall never understand its real naturalness and its vast power of adaptation to that environment.

The Main Means to a Recovery of the Outlines.

For if we look back to the evidence of the first two centuries of our era (and to our mind no evidence with regard to the origins subsequent to this period is of any validity) for an understanding of the actual state of affairs, instead of one Church and one form of faith, we find innumerable communities and innumerable modes of expression—communities united for

the living of a Life and systems striving to express the radiance of a Light. In many of these communities and these expressions we find intimate points of contact with the life and faith of the best in universal religion, and a means that will help us to fill in the outlines of the background of the origins with a greater feeling of confidence than we had previously thought possible.

So far from finding the sharp divorcement between science (or philosophy) and religion (or theology) which has characterised all later periods of the Christian era up to our own day, it was just the boast of many of these communities that religion was a science; they boldly claimed that it was possible to know the things of the soul as definitely as the things of the body; so far from limiting the illumination which they had received to the comprehension of the poorest intellect, or confining it to the region of blind faith, they claimed that it had supplied them with the means of formulating a world-philosophy capable of satisfying the most exacting intellect. Never perhaps has the world witnessed more daring efforts to reach a solution of the world-problem than were attempted by some of these mystic philosophers and religio-scientists. That their attempts are for the most part incomprehensible to the modern mind is partly owing to the fact that our record of them is so imperfect, and partly due to the natural impossibility of expressing in human language the stupendous realities to which they aspired; nevertheless their "heaven-storming," when

we can understand its nature, is a spectacle to move our admiration and (if we cast aside all prejudice) make us bow our heads before the Power which inspired their efforts.

The Gnostic Schools.

They strove for the knowledge of God, the science of realities, the gnosis of the things-that-are; wisdom was their goal; the holy things of life their study. They were called by many names by those who subsequently haled them from their hidden retreats to ridicule their efforts and anathematise their doctrines, and one of the names which they used for themselves, custom has selected to be their present general title. They are now generally referred to in Church history as the Gnostics, those whose goal was the Gnosis,—if indeed that be the right meaning; for one of their earliest existing documents expressly declares that Gnosis is not the end—it is the beginning of the path, the end is God—and hence the Gnostics would be those who used the Gnosis as the means to set their feet upon the Way to God.

Where to Look for their Origins.

The question which at once presses itself upon the attention of the student of history is: Whence did these men come? Did they arise suddenly in the midst of a world that cared not for these things; were they entirely out of touch with the past; had they no predecessors? By no means; those who so bitterly opposed them, who—boasting themselves to be the only legitimate inheritors of the illumination of the Christ—in their most angry mood, stigmatised the Gnostics as "the first-born of Satan," may help us to set our feet in the

direction where we shall find some materials on which to base an answer. In less bitter mood, the Church Fathers tell us that the doctrines of the Gnosis are of Plato and Pythagoras, of Aristotle and of Heracleitus, of the Mysteries and Initiations of the nations, and not of Christ. Let us then try for a brief space to follow this lead and fill in some rough outlines of the background of the Gnosis; we shall then be better able to say whether or no we join our voices to the hue and cry of the heresy-hunters.

The Nature of the Field to be Surveyed.

In what follows we shall only attempt the vaguest indications of the vast field of research in which the student of the Christian origins has to labour, before he can really appreciate the nature of the soil in which the seed was sown. The political history and social conditions of the time have to be carefully studied and continually borne in mind, but the most important field to be surveyed is the nature of the religious world, especially during the three centuries prior to our era. How is it possible, we ask ourselves, as we gaze upon the blendings of cult, the syncretism of theogonies and cosmogonies and the mixtures of faith which abounded in these centuries, to separate them into their original elements? The problem seems as hopeless as the endeavour to trace the mixtures of races and sub-races, of nations and families, which were the material means of these blendings of cult and religion. Where can we begin? For if we begin where known history fails (as is usually the case), and imagine that we have here

reached a state of things primitive, we are forced to be ever revising our hypotheses by each new archæological and ethnological discovery. Tribes which we have regarded as primitive savages are found to be the decaying remnants of once great nations, their superstitions and barbarous practices are found blended with the remnants of high ideas which no savagery could evolve; where shall we seize a beginning in this material of protean change? Surely we cannot trace it on the lines of material evolution alone? May it not be that there is the "soul of a people" as well which has to be reckoned with?

The Soil of the Field.

Just as the bodies of men are born from other bodies, so are nations born from nations. But if the physical heredity of a man is difficult to trace (since the farther it is pushed back the more it ramifies), far more difficult is the heredity of a nation, for whereas a man has but two parents a nation may have many, and whereas the bodies of a man's parents at death are hidden away to decay in the earth, the bodies of nations decay in the sight of all, and persist mingled with their children and grand-children, and all the family-tree which they share with other nations. Nations may have certain distinguishing characteristics, but they are not individualised in the same way as a man is individualised; and the problem of their inner heredity is more difficult to solve than even that of the nature of the animal soul, for it is on a vaster scale.

Such then being the nature of the physical vehicle of the general religious consciousness, it is not

surprising to find that the history of the evolution of religious ideas is one of the most difficult of studies.

If we bear all these presuppositions in mind, it requires the greatest courage to venture on any attempt at generalization; we feel that every statement ought to be qualified by so many other considerations that we are almost disgusted with its crudity, and know that we are only tracing the bones of skeletons when we ought to be clothing them with flesh, and making them vibrant with life.

But to return to the antecedents of the special period and movement we have in view.

Three main streams mingle their waters together in the tumbling torrent that swirls through the land in these critical centuries.

Three main elements are combining their substance and transmuting their natures in the seething crucible of the first centuries of the Christian era.

Three Mother Streams.

Greece, Egypt, and Jewry receive the child in their arms, suckle the body of the new born babe, and watch round its cradle. The irrational soul of it is like to the animal souls of its nurses; its rational soul is of like heredity with their minds, but the spirit within it is illumined by the Christ. It is the heredity of its rational and spiritual soul, however, to which we shall pay the greatest attention; for in this is to be found the inner side of the religions of Jewry, Egypt, and Greece.

We have then to search most carefully in the direction in which this can be found; we shall not find it in the cult and practice of the people, but in the religion and discipline of the philosopher and

sage, of the prophet and priest. For antiquity, there were as many degrees in religion as there were grades in human nature; the instruction in the inner degrees was reserved to those who were fit to comprehend; mystery-institutions and schools of initiation of every degree were to be found in all great nations, and to them we must look for the best in their religions—not infrequently, alas, for the worst as well, for the worst is the corruption of the best; but of this we will speak elsewhere.

Let us then first turn our attention to the religion of the intelligence of Greece.

GREECE.

The Greece of 600 B.C.

If we turn to the Greece of the sixth century prior to our era, we can perceive the signs of the birth of a new spirit in the Western world, the beginning of a great intellectual activity; it is, so to speak, the age of puberty of the Greek genius, new powers of thought are coming into activity, and the old-time myths and ancient oracular wisdom are receiving new expression in the infant science of empirical physics and the birth of philosophy.

This activity is part and parcel of a great quickening, an outpouring of power, which may be traced in other lands as well; it is an intensification of the religious consciousness of the nations, and it intensified the religious instinct of Greece in a remarkable manner. Its most marked characteristic

is the application of the intellect to things religious, owing to the accelerated development of this faculty in man.

The greatest pioneers of this activity were men whose names still live in the temple of fame. In the far East we have Confucius and Laotze, in India Gautama the Buddha, in Persia the last of the Zoroasters, in Greece Pythagoras; there were others doubtless elsewhere who acted as messengers of the Light, but our existing records are too imperfect to permit us to trace their paths.

Can any who believe in the providence of Wisdom in human affairs, doubt but that this was part of some great plan for man's advancement? If there be a Providence "that shapes our ends," where can we see its hand more clearly than in such great happenings?

The Precursors of Pythagoras.

But to confine ourselves to Greece; we must not suppose that Pythagoras was without predecessors; for though his later followers would have us think that all philosophy flowed from him, we cannot believe in this so sudden appearance of it, and we doubt not that Pythagoras regarded himself as the enunciator of old truths and but one of the teachers of a line of doctrine. He had Pherecydes and Anaximander and Thales before him in Asia Minor, and other teachers in Egypt and Chaldæa and elsewhere. Indeed in these early days it is almost impossible to separate philosophy from mythology and all the ancient ideas connected with it. If we look to the times of Thales, who is regarded as the herald of the first elements of philosophy in the Grecian world, and

who lived a century earlier than Pythagoras, we find a state of affairs somewhat as follows.

The educated and travelled of the Greeks of the time regarded Egypt as the centre of all learning and culture and their own forbears as of no account in such matters. The rhapsodists of the Homeric poems flattered their vanity by singing of the prowess of their ancient heroes, but could tell the intelligent nothing of religion; as for Hesiod and his theogany and the rest, they could make but little of them. He was doubtless more intelligible than the archaic fragments of the Orphic poems which enshrined the most ancient elements of the religious tradition of Hellas. But he fell far short of the wisdom of Egypt. As for the Orphic fragments, they were the relics of their barbarous ancestors, and no one believed in them but the superstitious and ignorant.

But a nation that is to be something of itself and not a mere copier of others must have confidence in its past traditions, and we find about this time that there arose a growing interest in these old fragments, which gradually led to their collection and translation into the Greek of the period. This took place at the end of the sixth century, and the name identified most closely with this activity to recover the fragments of the old tradition was that of Onomacritus.

It is interesting to notice how that this was done just prior to the period when Greece cast back the invading hosts of Xerxes from the shores of Europe. The effort seems to have been to revive in Greece the memory of its past by recovering the channel of its ancient inspiration, and at the same time to

let her feel the strength of her peculiar genius in thinking out the old oracular wisdom in terms of her fresh intellect, that so she might feel courage to hurl back the invading forces of the East, and pave the way to her future conquests of that same East in the days of Alexander.

At this period, then, we notice the rise of philosophy and the revival of the Orphic tradition. **The Orphic Tradition.** But this is not all; the leaven is working within as well as without, and we find an enormously increased activity in those most sacred institutions of the religious life of Greece—the Mysteries. But before we proceed to consider briefly this perhaps the most important point of all, let us try to take a hasty retrospect along the line of the Orphic tradition; for those who studied such matters in later Greece more deeply than the rest, assert with one voice that the line of their descent was from Orpheus through Pythagoras and Plato.

The Greeks known to history seem to have formed part of one of the waves of immigration **Primitive Hellas.** into Europe of the great Aryan stock. Of the main wave there were doubtless many wavelets.

If we may venture to believe that some germ of history underlies the records of the priests of Saïs communicated to Solon and preserved to us by Plato in his *Critias* and *Timæus*; according to them, so long ago as ten thousand years before our era, Attica was occupied by the long-forgotten ancestors of the Hellenes. Then came the great flood when the Atlantic Island was destroyed, and the shores of the Mediterranean rendered

uninhabitable by seismic disturbances of which the great cataclysm was but one of a number, the third it is said before the "Flood of Deucalion." It was the time of Egypt "before the flood" of which we have mention in the writings of Manetho.

If this be true, we can imagine how the wavelet of the conquering Aryan race which then occupied Hellas—the overlords of the "autochthones" of the period—was driven back, and how the country was left for long to the occupation of these same "autochthones" whom Herodotus calls "Pelasgi." They were to the Greeks, what the Dravidians were and are to the Indo-Aryans, "autochthones" if you will, but with a long history of their own if we could recover their records.

The polity of the ancient Greek inhabitants of Attica, according to the notes of Solon, bears a striking resemblance to the polity of the ancient Aryans in India, and doubtless their primitive religious traditions came from a common stock.

As for the "Pelasgi," who knows their traditions, or the blendings of races that had taken place before the remains of them could be classed as an indiscriminate mass? We are told, that they were ruled over by chiefs from the Atlantic Island who busily pushed its conquests to the most distant shores of the Great Sea (the Mediterranean), and that the ancient Hellenes disputed the lordship with this dominant race. What enormous possibilities of cult-mixtures myth-blending, and theocrasia have we here! It was these Atlanteans who introduced the cults of Poseidon and Hephæstus (Vulcan), the mighty powers of the

sea and of subterranean fire, which had destroyed their fathers.

For the Aryan Hellenic stock there was All-father Zeus and the Goddess of Wisdom, Pallas Athene, who was also a warrior goddess, as befitted a warlike race. What the Greek religion was at this period, who shall say? But it is not so wild a guess to suppose that it may have been of a bardic nature—hymn-bursts suited to warriors, of which we have relics in the legends of Druid and Bard and in all those ancient traditions of the Celt, in the mythology of the Teuton and Norseman, and even in the legend-lore preserved by the ancient Slavs.

The Wavelets of Aryan Immigration.

We may imagine how in these early years, as the strong current of the Aryan flood swept them onward, wavelet overlapped wavelet, horde fought with horde, and that the smiling land of Hellas was a rich prize for the strongest. We may imagine how when the effects of the "floods" had subsided and in course of many many years seismic disturbances had lessened; the Hellenic stock reoccupied the ground again, not only in Greece itself but also on the shores of Asia Minor. But how many wavelets of immigration flowed in until Homeric times who shall say? Perhaps some day it may be possible to sift out from the myths some deposit of history, and perceive how a Cecrops, an Erectheus, and an Ion did not follow each other in rapid succession, but were great leaders who established kingdoms separated by long periods of time.

May it not further be that with these conquering kings came bards to advise and encourage, and supply

what of religion was thought good for them? May we not seek for the prototype of Orpheus here, and to one of the later wavelets trace the archaic fragments of the most ancient religious poems? We may almost see some religious pomp of the time passing down the Sacred Way to Eleusis, ever the most sacred spot in Greece, with some Orpheus of the time rousing the warriors to enthusiasm by his songs, harp in hand, with his grey locks streaming in the breeze, while the regular march of the warriors kept time to the strain, and emphasized it by the rhythmic clashing of their shields.

The Orphic Line.

It would be vain to look for any intellectual presentation of religion along this line; whatever it was, it must have been inspirational, prophetical, and oracular; and indeed this is the peculiar characteristic of the Orphic tradition.

But even in these early days was the tradition a pure one? Scarcely; the various races must have fought their way through other races, and settled for a time among them before they reached Hellas, and the main line of their march seems to have been round the south shores of the Black Sea and through Thrace.

In Thrace they would meet with the cult of Dionysus and absorb some of its traditions; not that Thrace was the home of this cult, its origins appear to reach eastwards and back into time—a wide-spreading cultus with its roots in the soil of an archaic Semitism, the traces of which are hard to discover in the obscure and fragmentary records that we now possess. Moreover there is some mixture

of the Chaldean tradition in the Orphic line, but whether it existed at this period or was superadded later is hard to say.

What the precise religion of the earlier of these successive wavelets was like, when they had settled in the rich lands of Greece, and became more civilized, we can no longer say, for we have no records, but doubtless they were watched over and sufficient inspiration given them for their needs.

The Greece of Homer.

If we now turn to the Greece of Homer, and try to find traces of Orpheus, we are doomed to disappointment; but this is not altogether inexplicable. Homer sings of a Greece that seems to have entirely forgotten its ancient bards, of heroes who had left their religion at home, as it were. The yellow-haired Greeks who won the supremacy subsequent to Ion's time, were a stock that paid little attention to religion; they give one the impression of being some sort of Viking warriors who cared little for the agricultural pursuits in which their predecessors were engaged, if we can judge from the tradition preserved by Hesiod. We see a number of independent chieftains occupying the many vales of Greece, whose idea of providing for an increasing population is by foray and conquest.

There may have been a fickle Helen and a too gallant Paris who violated the hospitality of his hosts, but the Trojan War was more probably a foray of these warriors to gain new lands,—a foray not against an alien race, but against those of their own general kin; for the Trojans were Greeks, somewhat orientalised in their customs perhaps, by settlement in

contact with the nations of Asia, but for all that Greeks,—dark-haired Greeks, with a cult like the cult of the fair-haired ones, and with perchance for the most part as little understanding concerning it.

It is, however, just this absence of the priest, or the very subordinate position he holds, which is an indication of the germ of that independence of thought which is the marked characteristic of the Greek mind that was subsequently developed, and of which the Greece of history was the special and carefully watched depository, that it might evolve for the world-purpose for which it was destined. It was good for men to look the gods manfully in the face and battle with them if need be.

"Homer" was the bard of these Viking heroes; but the bard of their predecessors (who were equally Greeks) of the Hellenic stock which they had dominated, was "Orpheus." The descendants of the heroes of Troy naturally looked to "Homer" as the singer of the deeds of *their* forefathers, and as the recorder of their customs and cult; they were too proud to listen to "Orpheus" and the old "theologers" who had been the bards of the conquered; so the old songs and sagas of this bardic line, the lays and legends of this older Greece, were left to the people and to consequent neglect and lack of understanding.

"Orpheus" returns to Greece.

Such was the state of affairs when philosophy arose in the seventh century; it was then found by the few that Homer could not suffice for the religious needs of thinking men; there was nothing in Homer to compare with the religious traditions of Egypt and Chaldæa; the Greeks apparently had nothing of

religion, their ancestors were barbarians. Then it occurred to some to collect and compare the ancient oracles and religious myths of the people—the fragments of the Orphic songs—and therein they found proofs of an ancient Greek tradition of things unseen that could be favourably compared with much that Egypt and Chaldæa could tell them. Greece had a religious tradition; their forebears were not barbarous.

Those who busied themselves with such matters at this critical period, we may believe, were not left without guidance; and poets and thinkers were helped as they could receive it. The fragments of this activity in Orphic poesy which have come down to us, show signs of this inspiration; we do not refer to the late "Orphic Hymns," some eighty in number, which may be read in English in Taylor's translation, but to the ancient fragments scattered in the works of classical and patristic writers.

Many of these were based on the archaic fragments of the pre-Homeric times, and looked back to this archaic tradition as their foundation. But the mystic and mythological setting of these poems, their enthusiastic and prophetic character, though all-sufficient for many, were not suited to the nascent intellectuality of Greece which was asserting itself with such vigour. Therefore the greatest leaders of that thought sought means to clothe the ideas which were enshrined in myth and poesy, in modes more suitable to the intellectuals of the time; and we have the philosophy of a Pythagoras and subsequently of a Plato.

The Mysteries.

But alongside of the public cults and popular traditions there existed an inner organism of religion and channels of secret traditions concealed within the Mystery-institutions. If it is difficult to form any precise notion of the evolution of popular religious ideas in Greece, much more difficult is it to trace the various lines of the Mystery-traditions, which were regarded with the greatest possible reverence and guarded with the greatest possible secrecy, the slightest violation of the oath being punishable by death.

The idea that underlay the Mystery-tradition in Greece was similar to that which underlay all similar institutions in antiquity, and it is difficult to find any cult of importance without this inner side. In these institutions, in the inner shrines of the temple, were to be found the means of a more intimate participation in the cult and instruction in the dogmas.

The institution of the Mysteries is the most interesting phenomenon in the study of religion. The idea of antiquity was that there was something to be *known* in religion, secrets or mysteries into which it was possible to be initiated; that there was a gradual process of unfolding in things religious; in fine, that there was a science of the soul, a knowledge of things unseen.

A persistent tradition in connection with all the great Mystery-institutions was that their several founders were the introducers of all the arts of civilization; they were either themselves gods or were instructed in them by the gods—

in brief, that they were men of far greater knowledge than any who had come after; they were the teachers of infant races. And not only did they teach them the arts, but they instructed them in the nature of the gods, of the human soul, and the unseen world, and set forth how the world came into existence and much else.

Their Corruption.

We find the ancient world honey-combed with these institutions. They were of all sorts and kinds, from the purest and most noble down to the most degraded; in them we find the best and worst of the religion and superstition of humanity. Nor should we be surprised at this, for when human nature is intensified, not only is the better in it stimulated but also the worse in it finds greater scope.

When knowledge is given power is acquired, and it depends on the recipients whether or no they use it for good or evil. The teachers of humanity have ever been opposed by the innate forces of selfishness, for evolution is slow, and mankind wayward; moreover, men cannot be forced, they must come of their own free-will, "for love is the fulfilling of the law"; and so again though "many are the 'called,' few are the 'chosen.'"

The Reason of it.

It is said that these earliest teachers of humanity who founded the Mystery-institutions as the most efficient means of giving infant humanity instruction in higher things, were souls belonging to a more highly developed humanity than our own. The men of our infant humanity were children with minds but little developed, and only capable of

understanding what they distinctly saw and felt. In the earliest times, according to this view, the Mysteries were conducted by those who had a knowledge of nature-powers which was the acquisition of a prior perfected humanity not necessarily earth-born, and the wonders shown therein such that none of our humanity could of themselves produce. As time went on and our humanity more and more developed the faculty of reason, and were thought strong enough to stand on their own feet, the teachers gradually withdrew, and the Mysteries were committed to the care of the most advanced pupils of this humanity, who had finally to substitute symbols and devices, dramas and scenic representations, of what had previously been revealed by higher means.

Then it was that corruption crept in, and man was left to win his own divinty by self-conquest and persistent struggling against the lower elements in his nature. The teachers remained unseen, ever ready to help, but no longer moving visibly among men, to compel their reverence and worship. So runs the tradition.

The Various Traditions.

If, as we have seen, the origin and evolution of the popular cults of Greece are difficult to trace, much more difficult are the beginnings and development of the Greek Mystery-cultus. The main characteristic of the Mysteries was the profound secrecy in which their traditions were kept; we therefore have no adequate materials upon which to work, and have to rely mainly on hints and veiled allusions. This much, however, is

certain, that the Mystery-side of religion was the initiation into its higher cult and doctrine; the highest praise is bestowed upon the Mysteries by the greatest thinkers among the Greeks, who tell us that they purified the nature, and not only made men live better lives here on earth but enabled them to depart from life with brighter hopes of the future.

What the primitive Mystery-cultus traditions along the lines of Orphic, Dionysiac, and Eleusinian descent may have been, it is unnecessary to speculate in this rough outline sketch; but if we come down to the days of Plato we find existing Mystery-institutions which may be roughly characterised as political, private, and philosophic.

The Political Mysteries.

The political Mysteries—that is to say the State-Mysteries—were the famous Eleusinia, with their gorgeous external pageants and their splendid inner rites. At this period almost every respectable citizen of Athens was initiated, and we can easily see that the tests could not have been very stringent, when so many were admitted every year. In fact, these State-Mysteries, though providing for a grade or several grades of advancement along the path of right living and of right comprehension of life, had become somewhat perfunctory, as all departments of a State-religion are bound to become in time.

The Private Mysteries.

Alongside of the Eleusinia there existed certain private Mysteries, not recognised by the State, the number of which subsequently increased enormously, so that almost every variety of Oriental Mystery-cultus found its adherents in Greece, as may be seen

from a study of the religious associations among the Greeks known as Thiasi, Erani, and Orgeones; among private communities and societies of this kind there were to be found naturally many undesirable elements, but at the same time they satisfied the needs of many who could derive no spiritual nourishment from the State-religion.

The Orphic Communities.

Among these private foundations were communities of rigid ascetics, men and women, who gave themselves entirely to holy living; such people were said to live the "Orphic life" and were generally known as Orphics. Of course there were charlatans who parodied them and pretended to their purity and knowledge, but we are at present following the indications of those whose conduct squared with their profession.

These Orphic communities appear to have been the refuges of those who yearned after the religious life, and among them were the Pythagorean schools. Pythagoras did not establish something entirely new in Greece when he founded his famous school at Crotona; he developed something already existing, and when his original school was broken up and its members had to flee they sought refuge among the Orphics. The Pythagorean schools disappear into the Orphic communities.

It is in the Pythagorean tradition that we see the signs of what I have called the philosophic Mysteries; it is, therefore, in the best of the Orphic and Pythagorean traditions that we have to find the indications of the nature of the real Mysteries, and not in the political Eleusinia

or in the disorderly elements of the Oriental cults.

The Philosophic Mysteries.

In fact the Orphics did much to improve the Eleusinia and supported them as a most necessary means for educating the ordinary man towards a comprehension of the higher life. It stands to reason, however, that the Mysteries which satisfied the aspirations of Orphics and Pythagoreans were somewhat higher than the State-Mysteries of the ordinary citizen. These Pythagoreans were famous throughout antiquity for the purity of their lives and the loftiness of their aims, and the Mysteries they regarded with such profound reverence must have been something beyond the Eleusinia, something to which the Eleusinia were but one of the outer approaches.

Pythagoras and Plato.

We have then to seek for the innermost religious life of Greece in this direction, and to remember that the inner experiences of this life were kept a profound secret and not paraded on the housetops. Pythagoras is said to have been initiated into the Egyptian, Chaldæan, Orphic, and Eleusinian Mysteries; at the same time he was one of the chief founders of Greek philosophy. His philosophy however, was not a thing of itself, but the application of his intellect — especially of his mathematical genius—to the best in these Mystery-traditions; he saw that it was necessary to attempt to lead the rapidly evolving intellectuality of Greece along its own lines to the contemplation of the inner nature of things; otherwise in the joy of its freedom it would get entirely out of hand and reject the truths of the ancient wisdom.

Plato continued this task, though on somewhat different lines; he worked more in the world than Pythagoras, and his main effort was to clear the ground from misconceptions, so that the intellect might be purified and brought into a fit state to contemplate the things-that-are. He spent his life in this task, building up not so much a system of knowledge, as clearing the way so that the great truths of the Gnosis of things-that-are, as Pythagoras termed it, might become apparent of themselves.

It is a mistake to suppose that Plato formulated a distinctly new system of philosophy; his main conceptions are part and parcel of the old wisdom handed down by the seers of the Mysteries; but he does not formulate them so much as clear the ground by his dialetical method, so that the mind may be brought into a fit state to receive them.

Therefore are the conclusions of his dialogues nearly always negative, and only at the end of his long life, probably against his better judgment and in response to the importunity of his pupils, does he set forth a positive document in the *Timæus*, composed of scraps from the unpublished writings of Pythagoreans and others.

Unfortunately most of those who immediately followed him, imagined that his dialectical method was an end in itself, and so instead of living the life of philosophy and seeking the clear vision of true initiation, they degenerated into empty argument and ended in negation.

Aristotle followed with his admirable method

of analysis and exact observation of phenomena, and as he treated of the without rather than of the within he was from one point of view better understood than Plato, but from another more misunderstood, in that his method also was taken as an end in itself rather than as a means simply. And so we come to the three centuries prior to the present era, when the intellectual life of Greece was centred at Alexandria.

Aristotle and Scepticism.

It was a far more extended Greece than the Hellas of Plato; it was a Greece whose physical prowess had conquered the Orient, and which boasted itself that its intellectual vigour would conquer the world. Everywhere it matched its vigorous intellect against the ancient East, and for a time imagined that victory was with it.

Its independence of thought had given rise to innumerable schools warring with each other, and the spectacle it offers us is very similar to the spectacle of modern Europe during the last three hundred years.

We see there at work, though on a smaller scale—in germ as it were—the same intellectual activity which has charcterized the rise of the modern scientific method, and with it the same breaking down of old views, the same unrest, the same spirit of scepticism.

If we look to the surface of things merely, we might almost say that Greece had entirely forgotten the Mystery-tradition and gloried solely in the unaided strength of her intellect. But if we look deeper we shall find that this is not the case. In

the days of Plato the Orient and Egypt were brought to Greece so to speak, whereas later on Greece went to Egypt and the East.

East and West.

Now the ancient wisdom had its home in Egypt and Chaldæa and the Orient generally, so that though the Orphic and Pythagorean communities of Plato's time imported into Greece a modified Orientalism which they adapted to the Greek genius along the lines of their own ancient wisdom-tradition, when the Greeks in their thousands went forth into the East, those of them who were prepared by contact with these schools, came into closer intimacy with the ancient wisdom of the East, and drank it in readily.

As for the generality, just as the introduction of Orientalism into Greece among the people brought with it abuses and enthusiastic rites of an undesirable character, while at the same time it intensified the religious life and gave greater satisfaction to the religious emotions, so the Greek conquest of the Orient spread abroad a spirit of scepticism and unbelief, while sharpening the intellectual faculties.

But all this was a very gradual process, and the more scepticism increased, the intenser became the desire of numbers to withdraw from the warring clash of opinions, and seek refuge in the contemplative life that offered them knowledge. Oriental thinkers and mystics became Hellenized along the lines of Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy, and Greek philosophers became Orientalized by contact with members of the many communities that honeycombed not only Egypt and the rest of the

"barbarian" nations subject to Greece, but also Asia Minor and even Hellas herself. How numerous were these communities in the first century may be seen from a study of the writings of Philo Judæus and the life of Apollonius of Tyana, and from the picture of mystic Greece which may be recovered from the ethical and theosophical essays of Plutarch, and also from the many recently discovered inscriptions relating to the innumerable Religious Associations in Greece.

Rome.

When the Greek kingdoms of the Successors of Alexander were in their turn humbled beneath the conquering power of Rome, the organizing Italic genius policed the world, somewhat in a similar way to the fashion of the present British occupation of India. The legal mind and practical genius of Rome was never really at home in the metaphysical subtleties of Greek philosophy, or the mysticism of the East. In literature and art she could only copy Greece; in philosophy she sought for a rule of conduct rather than a system of knowledge, and so we find her, in the persons of her best men, the follower of Stoic naturalism, which summed up its code of ethics in the ideal of "*honestas.*"

The Mysteries of Mithras.

Nevertheless Rome could no more than Greece avoid religious contact with the East, and we find her passing through the same experiences as Greece, though in much more modified form. The chief point of contact among the many religions of the Roman Empire was in the common worship of the Sun, and the inner core of this most popular cult was, from about B.C. 70

onwards, to be found in the Mysteries of Mithras.

"The worship of Mithras, or of the sun-god, was the most popular of heathen cults, and the principal antagonist of the truth during the first four centuries of our period." Such is the statement of one who looks at it from the point of view of a Christian ecclesiastic, and indeed the Church Fathers from the time of Justin Martyr onward have declared that the Devil, in the Mysteries of Mithras, had plagiarized their most sacred rites by anticipation.

The Mithriac Mysteries represented the esoteric side of a great international religious movement, which the uniting together of many peoples into the Græco-Roman world had made possible, and which resulted from the contact of Greece and Rome with the thought of the East.

National and local cults were gradually influenced by the form of symbolism employed by the modified Chaldæo-Persian tradition; the worship of the Spiritual Sun, the Logos, with the natural symbol of the glorious orb of day, which was common in one form or other to all great cults, and the rest of the solar symbolism, gradually permeated the popular indigenous forms of religion. In course of time, Mithra, the visible sun for the ignorant, the Spiritual Sun, the Mediator between the Light and Darkness, as Plutarch tells us, for the instructed, caused his rays to shine to the uttermost limits of the Roman Empire. And just as his outer cult dominated the restricted forms of national worship, so did the

tradition of his Mysteries modify the Mystery-cultus of the ancient Western world.

EGYPT.

LET us now turn to Egypt and cast a glance on the vista which has to be surveyed, before the outlines of this part of the background of the Gnosis can be filled in.

The Wisdom of Egypt.

In spite of her reserve and immeasurable contempt for the upstart Greek genius, Egypt had, even in the times of the earliest Ptolemies, given of her wisdom to Greece. There had been an enormous activity of translation of records and documents, the origin of which is associated with the name of Manetho. It is very probable that Plutarch in his treatise on the Mysteries of Isis drew the bulk of his information from Manetho, and it is very evident that the doctrines therein set forward as the traditional wisdom of Egypt have innumerable points of contact with the Greek Trismegistic literature, those mystic and theosophic treatises which formed the manuals of instruction in the inner Hermetic schools, mystic communities which handed on the wisdom-tradition of Thoth, or Ṭeḥuti, the God of Wisdom, whose name, as Jamblichus tells us, was "common to all priests," that is to say, was the source of inspiration of the wisdom-tradition in all its branches.

The Greeks, finding in their own Hermes some points of similarity with the charactistics of Tehuti, called him by that name, with the added title

Trismegistus, or Thrice-greatest, because of his great wisdom. That the contents, though not the form, of the oldest treatises of this Trismegistic literature were largely Egyptian is further evidenced by Jamblichus in his treatise on the Mysteries of the Egyptians and Chaldæans.

Along these lines of contact between Egypt and Greece we can proceed to inspect the Egyptian wisdom on its own soil, and find in it many doctrines fully developed which without this investigation we should have considered as entirely indigenous to purely Christian soil. Indeed, in the Trismegistic literature we find a number of the distinctive doctrines of Gnostic Christianity but without the historic Christ; and all of these doctrines are seen to have existed for thousands of years previously in direct Egyptian tradition—especially the doctrines of the Logos, of the Saviour and Virgin Mother, of the second birth and final union with God.

The Blendings of Tradition.

But as in the case of Greece, so in the case of Egypt, within the Egyptian tradition itself there are all manners of conflation of doctrines, of syncretism and blendings, not only in the external popular cults but also in the inner traditions.

To take a single instance, there was a strong Semitic blend dating from the line of the Hyksōs (2000-1500 B.C.). At that time Seth, perchance identical with the title of the Supreme in the tongue of the Semitic conquerors, was a name of great honour. It was identified with Sothis, Sirius, the guardian star of Egypt, the Siriadic Land; and the Mysteries of Seth were doubtless

blended in some fashion with those of Osiris. After the hated Hyksōs were expelled it is true that Seth or Set was gradually identified with Typhon, the opponent of Osiris, the Logos; but this no more affects the real doctrines of the Mysteries of Seth, than the fact that the Iranian Aryans used the name Daevos to designate evil entities, destroyed the beneficent nature of the Devas of the Indo-Aryans; it simply registers a rivalry of cult and race and points to a previous epoch when there was intimate contact between the races and their religions. Equally so the Christian use of the term Demon does not dispose of the fact that the Daimones of the Greeks were beneficent beings; witness the Daimon of Socrates "who prevented him if he were about to do anything not rightly."

The ancient close political relations between Chaldæa and Egypt disclosed by archæological research, and the later Persian conquest of Egypt, must also have discovered points of contact in the domain of religion, especially in the Mystery-traditions, and future researches in the many hitherto unworked fields of Egyptology will doubtless throw fresh light on the mixed heredity of religion in Egypt, which is perhaps even more complicated than that of the cults of Greece.

In any case we cannot but feel the sublimity of many of the conceptions of the inner religion of Egypt, in spite of our present inability to classify them in a satisfactory manner. The vast and mysterious background of the cults of Egypt, the sonorous phrases and grandiose titles which we sift

out from the present unintelligibility of myth and symbol, persuade us that there was something great working within, and we find the innermost strivings of the mystics devoted to the "Birth of Horus," a shadowing forth of that greatest of all mysteries, the spiritual birth of man, whence man becomes a god and a son of the Father.

The Mystic Communities.

The Egyptians themselves, according to Greek writers, looked back to a time when their initiated priesthood was in possession of greater wisdom than was theirs in later times; they confess that they had fallen away from this high standard and had lost the key to much of their knowledge. Nevertheless the desire for wisdom was still strong in many of the nation, and Egypt was ever one of the most religious countries of the world. Thus we find the Jew Philo, in writing of the wisdom-lovers about A.D. 25, declaring that "this natural class of men is to be found in many parts of the inhabited world, both the Grecian and non-Grecian world, sharing in the perfect good. In Egypt there are crowds of them in every province, or nome as they call it, and especially round Alexandria."

The Therapeuts.

These wisdom-lovers Philo calls by the common name of Therapeuts, either because they professed an art of *healing* superior to that in ordinary use, for they healed souls as well as bodies, or because they were *servants* of God. He describes one of their communities, which evidently belonged to the circle of mystic Judaism; but the many other communities he mentions were also

devoted to the same ends, their members were strenuous searchers after wisdom and devoted practisers of the holy life. These secret brotherhoods left no records; they kept themselves apart from the world, and the world knew them not. But it is just these communities which were the immediate links in the chain of heredity of the Gnosis.

We must, therefore, make the most we can of what Philo has to tell us of these Healers; in order to do this thoroughly, it would of course be necessary to search through the whole of his voluminous works and submit the material thus collected to a critical examination—a task outside the scope of these short sketches. But as the matter is of vital importance, we cannot refrain from presenting the reader with a translation of the main source in Philo's writings from which we derive our information. But before giving this translation it is necessary to prefix a few words by way of introduction.

The Earliest Christians of Eusebius.

The appearance in 1895 of Conybeare's admirable edition of the text of Philo's famous treatise *On the Contemplative Life* has at length set one of the ingeniously inverted pyraminds of the origins squarely on its base again.

The full title of this important work is: *Philo about the Contemplative Life*, or *the Fourth Book of the Treatise concerning the Virtues*,—critically edited with a defence of its genuineness by Fred C. Conybeare, M.A. (Oxford, 1895). This book contains a most excellent bibliography of works relating to the subject.

The survival of the voluminous works of Philo through the neglect and vandalism of the Dark and

Middle Ages is owing to the fact that Eusebius, in his efforts to construct history without materials, eagerly seized upon Philo's description of the externals of the Therapeut order, and boldly declared it to be the earliest Christian Church of Alexandria.

This view remained unchallenged until the rise of Protestantism, and was only then called in question because the Papal party rested their defence of the antiquity of Christian monkdom on this famous treatise.

For three centuries the whole of the batteries of Protestant scholarship have been turned on this main position of the Roman and Greek Churches. For if the treatise were genuine, then the earliest Church was a community of rigid ascetics, men and women; monkdom, the *bête noire* of Protestantism, was coëval with the origins.

The Pseudo-Philo Theory.

These three centuries of attack have finally evolved a theory, which, on its perfection by Grätz, Nicolas, and Lucius, has been accepted by nearly all our leading Protestant scholars, and is claimed to have demolished the objectionable document for ever. According to this theory, "the Therapeutæ are still Christians, as they were for Eusebius; but no longer of a primitive cast. For the ascription of the work to Philo is declared to be false, and the ascetics described therein to be in reality monks of about the year 300 A.D.; within a few years of which date the treatise is assumed to have been forged" (*op. cit.*, p. vi.).

The consequence is that every recent Protestant Church history, dictionary, and encyclopædia, when

treating of the Therapeuts, is plentifully besprinkled with references to the ingenious invention, called the "Pseudo-Philo."

Its Death-blow.

This pyramid of the origins was kept propped upon its apex until 1895, when Conybeare's work was published, and all the props knocked from under it. Strange to say, it was then and only then that a critical text of this so violently attacked treatise was placed in our hands. At last all the MSS. and versions have been collated. With relentless persistence Conybeare has marshalled his Testimonia, and with admirable patience paralleled every distinctive phrase and technical expression with voluminous citations from the rest of Philo's works, of which there is so "prevalent and regrettable an ignorance." To this he has added an extensive Excursus on the Philonean authorship of the tract. If Philo did not write the *De Vita Contemplativa* then every canon of literary criticism is a delusion; the evidence adduced by the sometime Fellow of University College for the authenticity of the treatise is irresistible. We have thus a new departure in Philonean research.

The danger to certain orthodox presumptions which a thorough study of the rest of Philo's works would threaten, is evidenced by the concluding paragraph of Conybeare's preface, where he writes:

"It is barely credible, and somewhat of a reproach to Oxford as a place of learning, that not a single line of Philo, nor any work bearing specially on him, is recommended to be read by students in our Honour School of Theology; and that, although this most

spiritual of authors is by the admission, tacit or express, of a long line of Catholic teachers, from Eusebius and Ambrose in the fourth century down to Bull and Döllinger in modern times, the father not only of Christian exegesis, but also, to a great extent, of Christian dogmatics" (*op. cit.*, p. x.).

An Interesting Question of Date.

It is thus established that the *De Vita Contemplativa* is a genuine Philonean tract. As to its date, we are confronted with some difficulties; but the expert opinion of Conybeare assures us that "every reperusal of the works of Philo confirms my feeling that the D.U.C. is one of his earliest works" (*op. cit.*, p. 276). Now as Philo was born about the year 30 B.C., the date of the treatise may be roughly ascribed to the first quarter of the first century. ("About the year 22 or 23"—*op. cit.*, p. 290). The question naturally arises: At such a date, can the Therapeuts of Philo be identified with the earliest Christian Church of Alexandria? If the accepted dates of the origins are correct, the answer must be emphatically, No. If, on the contrary, the accepted dates are incorrect, then a vast problem is opened up, of the first importance for the origins of the Christian faith. Be this as it may, the contents of the *D.V.C.* are of immense importance and interest as affording us a glimpse into those mysterious communities in which Christians for so many centuries recognized their forerunners. The Therapeuts were not Christians; Philo knows absolutely nothing of Christianity in any possible sense in which the word is used to-day. Who, then, were they? The answer to this question

demands an entire reformulation of the accepted history of the origins.

The Title and Context.

The treatise bears in some MSS. the superscription, "The Suppliants, or Concerning the Virtues, Book IV., or Concerning the Virtue of the Suppliants, Book IV." By "Suppliant" Philo tells us he means "one who has fled to God and taken refuge with Him." (*De Sac. Ab. et C.*, i. 186, 33). It is highly probable that our tract formed part of the fourth book of Philo's voluminous work *De Legatione*, fragments only of which have survived.

"Time and Christian editors have truncated the *De Legatione* in a threefold way. Firstly, a good part of the second book has been removed, perhaps because it ran counter to Christian tradition concerning Pontius Pilate. Secondly, the entire fourth book was removed, as forming a whole by itself; and the first part of it has been lost, all except the scrap on the Essenes which Eusebius has preserved to us in the *Præparatio Evangelica*; while the account of the Therapeutæ was put by itself and preserved as a separate book. . . Thirdly, the palinode which formed the fifth book has been lost" (*op. cit.*, p. 284).

But to the tractate itself.

PHILO ON THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE.

The Essæans.

"As I have already treated of Essæans who assiduously practise the [religious] life of action, carrying it out in all, or, not to speak too presumptuously, in most of its degrees, I will at once, following the sequence of my subject, proceed to say as much as is proper concerning those who embrace [the life of] contemplation; and that too without adding anything of my own to better the matter—as all the poets and history-writers are accustomed to do in the scarcity of good material—but artlessly holding to the truth itself, for even the most skilful [writer], I know, will fail to speak in accordance with her.

"Nevertheless the endeavour must be made and we must struggle through with it; for the greatness of the virtue of these men ought not to be a cause of silence for those who deem it right that no good thing should be kept silent.

The Name Therapeut.

"Now the purpose of our wisdom-lovers is immediately apparent from their name. They are called Therapeutæ and Therapeutrides [men and women] in the original sense of the word; either because they profess an art of healing superior to that in use in cities (for that only heals (*θεραπεύει*) bodies, whereas this [heals our] souls as well when laid hold of by difficult and scarce curable diseases, which pleasure and desire, and grief and fear, selfishness and folly, and injustice, and

the endless multitude of passions and vices, inflict upon them), or else because they have been schooled by nature and the sacred laws to serve (*θεραπεύειν*) That which is better than the Good and purer than the One and more ancient than the Monad."

Philo here indulges in a digression, contrasting the unintelligent worship of externals by the misinstructed in all religions with the worship of true Deity by those who follow the contemplative life. Those who are content to worship externals are blind; let them then remain deprived of sight. And he adds significantly, that he is not speaking of the sight of the body, but of that of the soul, by which alone truth and falsehood are distinguished from each other.

"But as for the race of devotees [the Therapeuts], who are ever taught more and more to see, let them strive for the intuition of That which is; let them transcend the sun which men perceive [and gaze upon the Light beyond], nor ever leave this rank [order, space, or plane], which leads to perfect blessedness. Now they who betake themselves to [the divine] service [do so], not because of any custom, or on some one's advice or appeal, but carried away with heavenly love, like those initiated into the Bacchic and Corybantic Mysteries; they are afire with God until they behold the object of their love.

Their Abandonment of the World.

"Then it is that, through their yearning for that deathless and blessed Life, thinking that their mortal life is already ended, they leave their possessions to their sons and daughters, or, may

be, other relatives, with willing resolution making them their heirs before the time; while those who have no relatives [give their property] to their companions and friends."

In a digression Philo points out the difference between the sober orderly abandonment of property to follow the philosophic life, which he praises, and the wild exaggerations of the popular legends, which told how Anaxagoras and Democritus, when seized with the love of wisdom, allowed all their estates to be devoured by cattle.

"Whenever then [our wisdom-lovers] take the step of renouncing their goods, they are no longer enticed away by any one, but hurry on without once turning back, leaving behind them brethren, children, wives, parents, the multitudinous ties of relationship, and bonds of friendship, their native lands in which they have been born and reared; for the habitual is a drag and most powerful allurement.

Their Retreats.

"Nor do they emigrate to some other city (like illused or worthless slaves who, in claiming purchase from their owners, only procure for themselves a change of masters and not freedom), for every city, even the best governed one, is full of innumerable tumults, forms of destruction, and disorders which would be insupportable to a man who has once taken wisdom as a guide.

"But they make their abode outside the walls in [shut in] woods or enclosed lands in pursuit of solitude, [and this] not to indulge any feeling of churlish dislike to their fellow-men, but from a knowledge that continual contact with those of

dispositions dissimilar to their own is unprofitable and harmful.

"Now this natural class of men [*lit.* race] is to be found in many parts of the inhabited world, both the Grecian and non-Grecian world sharing in the perfect good.

The Mareōtic Colony.

"In Egypt there are crowds of them in every province, or nome as they call it, and especially round Alexandria. For they who are in every way [or in every nome] the most highly advanced come as colonists, as it were, to the Therapeutic fatherland, to a spot exceedingly well adapted for the purpose, perched on a fairly high terrace [small plateau or group of small hills] overlooking Lake Marea or Lake Mareōtis immediately south of Alexandria, in a most favourable situation both for security and mildness of temperature. Security [*sc.* from robbers] is ensured by the belt of homesteads and villages [which surrounds the terrace], and the mildness of temperature is due to the continual breezes sent up by the lake, which opens into the sea, and from the proximity of the open sea itself. The breezes from the sea are light, while those from the lake are heavy, and their combination produces a most healthy condition [of the atmosphere].

Their Dwellings.

"The dwellings of the community are very simple, merely providing shelter against the two greatest necessities,—the extreme heat of the sun and the extreme cold of the air. The dwellings are not close together as those in towns, for neighbourhood is irksome and unpleasing to those

who are seeking for solitude; nor are they far apart, because of the intercourse which is so dear to them, and also for mutual help in case of attack by robbers.

The Original Meaning of the Term Monastery.

"In each dwelling is a sacred place, called a shrine or monastery [a small chamber, closet, or cell], in which in solitude they perform the mysteries of the holy life, taking into it neither drink, nor food, nor anything else requisite for the needs of the body, but only the laws and inspired sayings of prophets, and hymns, and the rest, whereby knowledge and devotion grow together and are perfected.

"Thus they preserve an unbroken memory of God, so that even in their dream-consciousness nothing is presented to their minds but the glories of the divine virtues and powers. Hence many of them give out the rhythmic doctrines of the sacred wisdom, which they have obtained in the visions of dream-life.

Their Prayers and Exercises.

"Twice a day, at dawn and even, they are accustomed to offer up prayers; as the sun rises praying for the sunshine, the real sunshine, that their minds may be filled with heavenly Light, and as it sets praying that their soul, completely lightened of the lust of senses and sensations, may withdraw to its own congregation and council-chamber, there to track out truth.

"The whole interval from dawn to sunset they devote to their exercises. Taking the sacred writings they spend their time in study [*lit.* philosophise], interpreting their ancestral code allegorically, for

they think that the words of the literal meaning are symbols of a hidden nature which is made plain [only] by the under-meaning.

The Nature of their Books.

"They have also works of ancient authors who were once heads of their school, and left behind them many monuments of the method used in their allegorical works; taking these as patterns, as it were, they imitate the practice of their predecessors. They do not then spend their time in contemplation and nothing else, but they compose songs and hymns to God in all sorts of metres and melodies, outlined necessarily upon [a background of] the more solemn numbers [*lit.* rhythms].

Their Mode of Meeting.

"For six days on end every one remains apart in solitude with himself in his 'monastery,' as it is called, engaged in study, never setting foot out of door, or even looking out of window. But every seventh day they come together as it were to a general assembly, and take their seats in order according to their 'age' [that is, the length of their membership in the order], in the prescribed attitude, with their hands palms downwards, the right between the breast and chin, the left by the side. Then he who is the senior most skilled in the doctrines comes foward and discourses, with steadfast eyes and steadfast voice, with reason and thoughtfulness, not making a display of word-cleverness, as the rhetoricians and sophists of to-day, but examining closely and explaining the precise meaning in the thoughts, a meaning which does not merely light on the tips of the ears, but pierces the ear and reaches the soul and steadfastly

abides there. The rest all listen in silence, signifying their approval merely by a look in the eye or a nod of the head.

The Sanctuary.

"Now this general sanctuary in which they assemble every seventh day consists of two enclosures: one separated off for men, and the other for women. For women too habitually form part of the audience, possessing the same eager desire and having made the same deliberate choice [as the men].

"The division, however, between the two halls is only partly built up, some three or four cubits from the floor, like a breast-work, the rest of it, to the roof, being left open, and this for two reasons: in the first place for the preservation of that modesty which so becomes woman's nature, and in the second that sitting within earshot they may hear easily, since there is nothing in the way of the speaker's voice.

Their Rule.

"Now [our Therapeuts] first of all lay down continence as a foundation, as it were for the soul, and then proceed to build up the rest of the virtues upon it. Accordingly none of them would think of taking food or drink before sundown, for they consider that the practice of philosophy deserves the light, while the necessities of the body [may content themselves with] darkness; hence they assign the day to the former, and a brief portion of the night to the latter.

"A number of them, in whom the thirst for wisdom is implanted to a greater degree, remind themselves of their food but once in three days,

Fasting.

while a few are so cheered and fare so sumptuously at wisdom's banquet of teachings which she so richly and unstintingly sets before them, that they can last for twice the time, and even after six days barely take a mouthful of the most necessary food, being trained to live on air, as they say the grasshoppers do [Plato, *Phaedr.*], their needs made light by their singing methinks.

The Seventh Day Common Meal.

"Since then they regard the seventh day as all-hallowed and high festival, they consider it worthy of special honour, and on it, after paying due attention to the soul, they anoint the body, giving it, as also indeed they do their cattle, respite from continual labour. Still they partake of no dainty fare, but plain bread with salt for seasoning, which the gourmands supplement with an extra relish of hyssop; while for drink they have water from the spring. Thus in mollifying those tyrants which nature has set over the mortal race—hunger and thirst, they offer them nothing to tickle their vanity, but only such bare necessities as make life possible. Accordingly they eat only to escape hunger, and drink only to escape thirst, avoiding satiety as an enemy of and a plotter against both soul and body.

Housing and Clothing.

"Now there are two kinds of covering—clothes and house. As to their dwelling I have already stated above that it is anything but beautiful to look at, and put together anyhow, being made to answer only its most absolutely necessary purpose; and as to their clothing, it is equally of the plainest description, just to protect them from cold

and heat; in winter a thick mantle instead of a woolly hide, and in summer a sleeveless robe of fine linen.

"For in everything they practise simplicity, knowing that vanity has falsehood for its origin, but simplicity truth, each of them containing the innate power of its source; for from falsehood stream forth the manifold kinds of evils, while from truth come the abundant blessings of good both human and divine.

Their Sacred Feasts.

"I would also touch upon the general meetings in which they pass the time in greater festivity than usual banqueting together, contrasting them with the banquets of others."

Philo here indulges in a long digression in which he paints in the strongest colours the debauchery and extravagance of the banquets of voluptuaries, in order to contrast them as much as possible with the sacred feasts of the Therapeuts.

"In the first place they all come together at the end of every seventh week, for they reverence not only the simple period of seven days, but also the period of the power [or square] of seven, since they know that the 'seven' is pure and ever-virgin. Their seventh day festival then is only a prelude to their greatest feast, which is assigned to the fiftieth, the most holy and natural of numbers, [the sum] of the powers of the [perfect] right-angled triangle, which has been appointed as the origin of the generation of the cosmic elements.

"When then they have assembled together, clad in white robes, with joyous looks and with the

greatest solemnity, at sign from one of the Ephemereuts for the day (for this is the usual name for those who are engaged in such duties), and before sitting down, standing one beside the other in rows in a certain order, and raising their eyes and hands to heaven—their eyes, since they are trained to gaze on things worthy of contemplation; and their hands, since they are pure of gain, unstained by any pretence of money-making affairs—they offer prayer unto God that their banquet may be pleasing and acceptable.

The Banquet on the Fiftieth Day.

"After prayers the seniors sit down to table, following the order of their election. For they do not regard as seniors merely those who are advanced in years and have reached old age (nay, they regard such as quite young children if they have only lately fallen in love with the higher life), but such as have grown up and arrived at maturity in the contemplative part of philosophy, which is unqestionably its fairest and most divine portion.

Seniority.

"And women also share in the banquet, most of whom have grown old in virginity, preserving their purity not from necessity (as some of the priestesses among the Greeks), but rather of their own free-will, through their zealous love of wisdom, with whom they are so keenly desirous of spending their lives that they pay no attention to the pleasures of the body. Their longing is not for mortal children, but for a deathless progeny which the soul that is in love with God can alone bring forth, when the Father has implanted in it those spiritual light-beams, with which it shall

The Women Disciples.

contemplate the laws of wisdom. There is, however, a division made between them in their places at table, the men being apart on the right, and the women apart on the left."

(It should be remembered that it was the custom in the Greco-Roman world to recline at table, leaning on the left elbow with a cushion under the arm. The person reclining to the right of another was said to lie on the latter's breast (*ἀνακεῖσθαι ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ*). *Cf.* the canonical phrase, "the disciple who lay on His breast at meat.")

The Plain Couches.

"Perhaps you suspect that cushions, if not luxurious at any rate of tolerable softness, are provided for people well-born and well-bred and students of philosophy, whereas they have nothing but mattresses of the more easily procurable material (the papyrus of the country), over which [they throw] the plainest possible rugs, slightly raised at the elbow for them to lean upon. For on the one hand they somewhat relax their [usual] Spartan rigour of life [on such occasions], while on the other [even at the banquets] they always study the most liberal frugality in everything, rejecting the allurements of pleasure with all their might.

The Servers.

"Nor are they waited upon by slaves, since they consider the possession of servants in general to be contrary to nature. For nature has created all men free; but the injustice and selfishness of those who strive after inequality (the root of all evil), have set the yoke of power on the necks of the weaker and harnessed them to [the chariots of] the stronger.

"So in this holy banquet there is no slave, as I have said, but it is served by free men who perform the necessary service, not by compulsion, or waiting for orders, but of their own free-will anticipating the requests [of the guests] with promptitude and eagerness. For they are not chance free men who are appointed for such service, but juniors of the order who have been selected in order of merit with every possible care, who (as those noble and well-born and anxious to reach the summit of virtue should) with affectionate rivalry, as though they were their legitimate children, wait upon these fathers and mothers of theirs, regarding them as their common parents, bound to them with closer ties than their parents by blood: since, for those who think, there is no closer tie than virtue and goodness. And they come in to serve ungirdled, with their robes let down, so that no resemblance to a slave's dress may be introduced.

"I know that some of my readers will laugh at such a banquet as this; but such laughter will bring them weeping and sorrow.

The Frugal Fare.

"Nor is wine brought in on these occasions, but the clearest water, cold for the majority, and warmed for those of the older men whose tastes are delicate. The table moreover contains nothing that has blood in it, for the food is bread with salt for seasoning, to which hyssop is added as an extra relish for the gourmands. For just as right reason bids priests make offerings free from wine and blood, so does it bid these sages live. For wine is a drug that brings on madness, and costly

seasonings rouse up desire, the most insatiable of beasts. So much, then, for the preliminaries of the banquet.

The President.

"Now, after the guests have taken their places in the ranks I have described, and the waiters have taken their stand in order, ready to serve, when complete silence is gained—(and when is there not? you may say; but then there is deeper silence than before, so that no one ventures to make a sound or even breathe at all hard)—the president searches out some passage in the sacred scriptures or solves some difficulty propounded by one of the members, without any thought of display, for he does not aim at a reputation for cleverness in words, but is simply desirous of getting a clearer view of some points [of doctrine]; and when he has done so, he unselfishly shares it with those who, though they have not such keen vision as himself, nevertheless have as great a longing to learn.

The Instruction.

"The president for his part employs a somewhat leisurely method of imparting instruction, pausing at intervals and stopping for frequent recapitulations, impressing the ideas on their souls. (For when, in giving an interpretation, one continues to speak rapidly without pausing for breath, the mind of the hearers is left behind unable to keep up the pace, and fails to comprehend what is said.) While they, on their side, fixing all their attention upon him, remain in one and the same attitude listing attentively, showing their understanding and comprehension [of his words] by nod and look; praise of the speaker by a pleased expression and

the thoughtful turning to him of their faces, and hesitation by a mild shake of the head and a motion of the forefinger of the right hand. And the juniors who stand at service are just as attentive as the seniors at table.

The Interpretation of Scripture.

"Now the interpretation of the sacred scriptures is based upon the under-meanings in the allegorical narratives; for these men look upon the whole of their law-code as being like to a living thing, having for body the spoken commands, and for soul the unseen thought stored up in the words (in which thought the rational soul [of the student] begins to contemplate things native to its own nature more than in anything else)—the interpretation, as it were, in the mirror of the names, catching sight of the extraordinary beauties of the ideas contained in them, unwrapping and unrobing the symbols from them, and bringing to light the naked inner meanings, for those who are able with a little suggestion to arrive at the intuition of the hidden sense from the apparent meaning.

"When then the president seems to have discoursed long enough, and the discourse, according to its range, to have in his case made good practice at the points aimed at, and in theirs [to have met with due] attention, there is a burst of applause from the company, as though they would offer their congratulations, but this is restricted to three claps of the hands.

The Singing of Hymns.

"Then the president, rising, chants a hymn which has been made in God's honour, either a new one which he has himself composed, or an old one of

the ancient poets. For they have left behind them many metres and tunes in trimetric epics, processional hymns, libation odes, altar-chants, stationary choruses, and dance-songs, [all] admirably measured off in diversified strains.

"And after him the others also in bands, in proper order, [take up the chanting], while the rest listen in deep silence, except when they have to join in the burden and refrains; for they all, both men and women, join in.

Bread and Salt.

Then when hymns are over, the juniors bring in the table, which was mentioned shortly before, with the all-pure food upon it, leavened bread, with flavouring of salt mingled with hyssop, out of respect to the holy table set up in the holy place of the temple. For on this table are loaves and salt without seasoning; the loaves are unleavened and the salt unmixed with anything else; for it was fitting that the simplest and purest things should be allotted to the most excellent division of the priests, the reward of their ministry, while the rest should strive after things of similar purity, but abstain from the same food [as the priests], in order that the more excellent should have this privilege.

The Sacred Dancing.

"After the banquet they keep the holy all-night festival. And this is how it is kept. They all stand up in a body, and about the middle of the entertainment they first of all separate into two bands, men in one and women in the other, And a leader is chosen for each, the conductor whose reputation is greatest and the one most suitable for the post.

They then chant hymns made in God's honour in many metres and melodies, sometimes singing in chorus, sometimes one band beating time to the answering chant of the other, [now] dancing to its music, [now] inspiring it, at one time in processional hymns, at another in standing songs, turning and returning in the dance.

"Then when each band has feasted [that is, has sung and danced] apart by itself, drinking of God-pleasing [nectar], just as in the Bacchic rites men drink the wine unmixed, then they join together, and one chorus is formed of the two bands, in imitation of the joined chorus on the banks of the Red Sea because of the wonderful works that had been there wrought. For the sea at God's command became for one party a cause of safety and for the other a cause of ruin."

(Philo here refers to the fabled dance of triumph of the Israelites at the destruction of Pharaoh and his host, when Moses led the men and Miriam the women in a common dance; but the Therapeuts all over the world could not have traced the custom to this myth.)

"So the chorus of men and women Therapeuts, being formed as closely as possible on this model, by means of melodies in parts and harmony—the high notes of the women answering to the deep tones of the men—produces a harmonious and most musical symphony. The ideas are of the most beautiful, the expressions of the most beautiful, and the dancers reverent; while the goal of the ideas, expressions, and dancers is piety.

The Morning Prayer.

"Thus drunken unto morning's light with this fair drunkenness, with no head-heaviness or drowsiness, but with eyes and body fresher even than when they came to the banquet, they take their stand at dawn, when, catching sight of the rising sun, they raise their hands to heaven, praying for sunlight and truth and keenness of spiritual vision. After this prayer each returns to his own sanctuary, to his accustomed traffic in philosophy and labour in its fields.

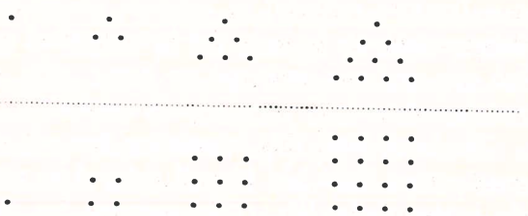
"So far then about the Therapeuts, who are devoted to the contemplation of nature and live in it and in the soul alone, citizens of heaven and the world, legitimately recommended to the Father and Creator of the Universe by their virtue, which procures them His love, virtue that sets before it for its prize the most suitable reward of nobility and goodness, outstripping every gift of fortune, and the first comer in the race to the very goal of blessedness."

A Note on the Sacred Numbers.

With regard to the mystic numbers 7 and 50 mentioned in the text above, it may be of interest to remark that Philo elsewhere (*Leg. Alleg.*, i. 46) tells us that the Pythagoreans called the number 7 the ever-virgin, because "it neither produces any of the numbers within the decad [*i.e.*, from 1 to 10] nor is produced by any of them." The power or square of 7 is 49, and the great feast therefore took place every fiftieth day. The number 50 is based on the proportioned of the sides of the "perfect" right-angled triangle, the famous Pythagorean triangle

so often referred to by Plato. (*Cf. The Nuptial Number of Plato*, by James Adam, M.A., Cambridge, 1891; the best work on the subject.) The sides of this triangle bear the proportions of 3, 4, and 5, and $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$, or $9 + 16 = 25$; and $9 + 16 + 25 = 50$.

In another treatise (*Qu. in Gen.*, iii. 39) we get some further interesting information concerning the 50. Philo speaks of two series, which he calls triangles and squares, namely 1, 3, 6, 10, and 1, 4, 9, 16. At first sight it is difficult to discover why Philo should call the first series of numbers triangles, but it has occurred to me that he had in mind some such arrangement as the following.



Many interesting correspondences may be made out from the study of the apparently simple ordering of these points, monads, or atoms, but we are at present only engaged on the consideration of the number 50.

With regard to the triangular series, 1, 3, 6, 10, it is to be noticed that $1 = 1$; $3 = 1 + 2$; $6 = 1 + 2 + 3$; and $10 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4$.

With regard to the square series, 1, 4, 9, 16, we see at once that $1 = 1^2$; $4 = 2^2$; $9 = 3^2$; and $16 = 4^2$. Moreover $1 + 3 + 6 + 10 = 20$; and $1 + 4 + 9 + 16 = 30$; and finally $20 + 30 = 50$.

Much more could be said; but our space is limited, and those who are interested in the matter can easily work out details for themselves.

Philo's Connection with the Therapeuts.

In reading this treatise and the rest of the references to the Therapeuts scattered through Philo's writings, the chief questions that naturally arise are: What was Philo's connection with them; and how far can we rely on his account? There is an important passage in his writings which gives us the critical point of departure in seeking an answer. Philo (*Leg. Alleg.*, i. 81) writes:

"I too have ofttimes left my kindred and my friends and country, and have gone into the wilderness [or into solitude] in order to comprehend the things worthy to be seen, yet have profited nothing; but my soul was scattered or stung with passion, and lapsed into the very opposite current."

We learn from this interesting item of autobiography that Philo had himself enjoyed no success in the contemplative life. This accounts for his great reverence and high respect for those who had succeeded in comprehending the things "worthy to be seen." Now as Philo never abandoned his property, he could therefore not have been a full accepted member of one of these brotherhoods. In all probability he belonged to one of their outer circles. As was the case with the Pythagoreans and Essenes, the Therapeuts had lay-pupils who lived in the world and who perhaps resorted to the community now and again for a period of "retreat," and then returned again to the world.

That these lay-disciples were men of great ability

The Lay Disciples.

and insight is amply shown by the works of Philo himself, but that there was a large literature of a still loftier and more inspired character is also evident from what Philo has to say of his teachers. What has become of all these works, commentaries, interpretations, hymns, sermons, expositions, apocalypses—works which aroused the admiration of so distinguished a writer as Philo? It seems to me that though we may have some scraps of them embedded in the Jewish Pseudepigrapha which have come down to us, many of them belonged to the now lost precursors of the fragments of the Gnostic literature which have survived.

But were the Therapeuts Jews, as Philo would lead us to believe in his apology for that nation? It is evident from his own statements that the community which he describes, and with which he was probably connected as lay-pupil, was but one of a vast number scattered all over the world. Philo would have us believe that his particular community was the chief of all, doubtless because it was mainly Jewish, though not orthodoxly so, for they were "sun-worshippers."

The Variety of Communities.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that there were at this time numerous communities of mystics and ascetics devoted to the holy life and sacred science scattered throughout the world, and that Philo's Mareotic community was *one* of these. Others may have been tinged as strongly with Eygptian, or Chaldæan, or Zoroastrian, or Orphic elements, as the one south of Alexandria was tinged with Judaism. It is further not incredible

that there were also truly eclectic communities among them who combined and synthesized the various traditions and initiations handed down by the doctrinally more exclusive communities, and it is in this direction therefore that we must look for light on the origins of Gnosticism and for the occult background of Christianity. These communities did not at this time propagandize, though they may have indirectly been at the back of some of the greatest propagandist efforts, as in the case of Philo. I also think that the later Gnostic communities did not propagandize directly, and that whatever works they may have put foward for lay-pupils or by lay-pupils were only a small part of their literature. For the people there were the Law and the Prophets and the Gospel; for the lay-pupils, the intermediate literature; and for those within, those most highly mystical and abstruse treatises that none but the trained mystics could possibly understand or were expected to understand.

IF YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND TRUTH YOU MUST REMOVE FROM YOUR HEART THOSE STONES AND WEEDS WHICH STRANGLE ITS FULL GROWTH.

—KRISHNAMURTI